

*One day he'll understand. He'll see me as a person, not just a black man.*

*I believe that love is the answer. I believe that love will find the way.*

Eliot Sloan (*I Believe*)

#### Chapter 4: **Naturally Relational**

*It's a Wonderful Life*, based on Philip Van Doren Stern's 24-page Christmas pamphlet, tops the American Film Institute's list of the most inspiring movies of all time. As president of a building and loan which has misplaced a large sum of money, its main character, George Bailey, expects to go to jail for bank fraud. Trusting absentminded Uncle Billy with so much money was an obvious gamble for George, and he failed to hedge that bet. He cannot afford to cover the loss; his own house is falling apart. He feels trapped. He has long given-up the dreams of his youth. He is worn down to the point of desperation.

He takes his frustration out on his children and wife, and sells-out his morals. Everything he does makes people angry with him. Driving drunk through the snow at night, he crashes his car into a tree. He trudges through the snow by foot until he reaches a bridge over a freezing river. It's Christmas Eve, and his four children deserve a Christmas he cannot deliver. He plans to kill himself, figuring his life insurance policy makes him worth more dead than alive.

George doesn't realize that he is only hours away from the most wonderful experience of his life. His wife has phoned friends who are phoning friends who are phoning friends. They are rallying and praying for him. Their prayers are so strong and numerous that they shift

the mood of heaven itself, and the angels send a guardian to make sure George doesn't end his life before his big moment arrives.

The guardian shows George that he underestimates his value, that every touch he makes on the lives of others grows like a seed which produces more seed in turn. George's big moment arrives when he finally turns himself over to the authorities. Supporters arrive like a flood, each offering whatever they can. A contagious spirit of generosity spreads like wildfire, touching George in a way no one could ever forget. The angels leave him with a note: "Dear George: Remember no man is a failure who has friends."

Bailey's friends forgave and rallied around him, even when he would not forgive himself. If you find this ending satisfying, then you probably overlook the fact that it undermined the legal process and was unfair – surely there were other unfortunate people who deserved mercy more than George did. You would overlook this fact because the story is about love, and love goes beyond fairness and law. The ending warms viewer's hearts for the same reasons it warms hearts to witness support for the victims of tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, fires and terrorist acts, and to care for babies, pets, and others who cannot reciprocate. It is not because we believe in law or logic, but because we believe in love.

If you are naturally relational, then you prefer to be guided more by empathy than by law or logic. Prioritizing feelings over principles allows you to adjust to the unpredictable situations you encounter. Like a good dance partner, you adjust to others even before reasoning about it. You seek to go beyond politeness, to care genuinely, to develop and be guided by good character. You credit your character to the relationships which have shaped

you, so you may be especially concerned with finding good role-models and making sure people associate with a good crowd and/or a good partner.

### Your Heritage as Naturally Relational

As a naturally relational person, you inherit a wealth of theories, stories, laws, traditions, organizations, and technologies tuned to meet your needs.

Relational orientation has the oldest and, therefore, strongest track-record of all GRIN-orientations. Its distinguishing characteristic is its subjectivity: bias towards closest members of one's relational network. Today, we speak about closeness in terms of love, shared interests, and commitment, but closeness also includes physical proximity, and, in that sense, relational orientation began with the creation of our universe. The magnitudes of forces in our universe have always varied by physical proximity. Though the Earth is much smaller than Jupiter, for example, its gravitational pull on us is far greater because of its physical proximity. It is difficult to imagine a viable universe without such relational orientation.

Human relationships go beyond physical proximity, however. The closest members of our relational network include family, friends, coworkers, and customers, any of which may live far away. Scientists often credit this phenomenon to evolution. At least one of the functions of genetic evolution is to bias individuals towards reproduction of genes most similar their own. Thus, evolution produces bias toward kin. It produces a "blood" relationship comparable to physical closeness. Biologists cite a variety of species which seem biased toward aiding in the survival and reproduction of other members of their own family or species.

The mechanism behind this bias is not a gene detector—it is a set of neurochemical processes which produce special kinds of memories known as “attachments.” Although attachment may have evolved to bias us towards our biological family, the same mechanism can bias us toward an adopted family, a lover, friends, and even pets. Attachments are structures in our brains, but often described as social phenomena because they guide relationally-oriented behavior much as objective rules guide institutionally-oriented behavior and goals guide negotiation. The biological basis of attachment may be your greatest inheritance as a naturally relational person; because most humans share this biology, they can empathize with you.

In other words, your greatest inheritance is love. You can love because you have been loved, and others can love you because they have been loved. This is social as well as biological. The 2000 Warner Brothers film *Pay It Forward* popularized the theory that attachment grows through cascades. Its main character, Trevor, described it like this: "That's me. And that's three people. And I'm going to help them. And they do it for three other people, and they do it for three more...but it has to be something really big, something they can't do by themselves..." If love spreads in this way, like a contagion, then it is the winning move in the game of social evolution. It is the king of ideas. The entire world will inevitably fall under its spell.

Most major world religions and philosophies were founded in an age dominated by relational evaluation, and continue to provide communities and formal theories to support it. The Abrahamic faiths and Confucian role ethics, as examples, include teachings which justify bias toward parents and other relatives. Similar teachings justify special treatment for the Levite and Brahmin castes. Aristotle, the founder of formal logic, refined such teachings into what is

now called "virtue ethics." One cannot objectively measure compliance with subjective rules like "Love your neighbor", "Honor your parents", "Do your best", "Never give-up", and "Know thyself," so Aristotle rephrased moral rules as moral virtues. The rules above, as examples, might be rephrased as the virtues of "kindness," "respect," "industriousness," "persistence," and "wisdom." Virtue ethics prizes attachment at least as much as it prizes action. It prizes attachment to family, to self, to nature, to ideas, and even to emotions—love of learning might qualify as a virtue. Each major world religion endorses relational nature by promoting virtues. Even in academia, virtue ethics is considered a respectable theory, providing strong defense for your natural form of evaluation.

Such defense has become especially important in the last few centuries as people with relational nature have suffered the proposition that all people should have equal opportunity. In 1692, Pope Innocent XII issued *Romanum decet Pontificem*, a bull which forbid popes from appointing more than one relative to the office of Cardinal. This bull is credited with introducing the term "nepotism," which has since grown to express condemnation for any non-merit-based favor towards relatives in politics, entertainment, business or religion. The concept of "cronyism," of which sexism and racism are special cases, extends this condemnation to any non-merit-based favoritism, including saving seats for one's friends at lunch. Taken to its logical conclusion, the concept of equal opportunity raises objection to every practical friendship.

The result of the anti-cronyism movement has been that many government workers, religious workers, and leaders of publicly traded companies feel forbidden to act out of empathy in their work. They feel required to justify their decisions with formal arguments, legal analyses or financial projections, to prove that their decisions flow from other GRIN-

orientations. In this way, relational-orientation is effectively excluded from the public sphere. Your freedom to be yourself is the stake driving culture wars between small churches and big churches, family-owned businesses and publicly-traded companies, business and government.

The opposition has advanced several legal innovations which shift power from relational groups (e.g. families) to objective institutions (e.g. governments). Prior to these innovations, it was so difficult to become divorced or emancipated that families would resolve internal conflict through reconciliation. Racial, religious, ethnic, and gender discrimination made it especially difficult for minorities to avoid reconciliation. The abolition of the laws of primogeniture and the creation of laws to facilitate divorce, to protect children's rights, and to prevent discrimination, removed these barriers to defection, and made it normal for relationships to break permanently.

None of these innovations attack relational nature directly. They oppress relational nature only because we fail to innovate equally-effective alternatives to heal broken relationships. We are still allowed to be biased toward our own children, to give them food, shelter, and clothing which we do not give to other children. Many people even receive tax breaks for serving in this biased role, and are eligible for special welfare to support it. Relational nature is also prized in professions such as health care, child care, elder care, and hospitality which demand what academics call "emotional labor." As currently designed, these jobs tend to yield lower salaries and higher burnout, but they are expected to become more numerous in the future because emotional labor is difficult to automate.

Modern technologies may have mixed impact on relationships, but it is difficult to deny that they empower you to maintain relationships over longer distances and to form much larger networks. The "global brain" metaphor implies a relational network so technologically

enhanced that it spans the entire planet. This trend is especially empowered through mobile communication and social media technologies like Facebook.

Alan Loy McGuinnis, author of the internationally bestselling *The Friendship Factor*, concludes with a quote from Teilhard de Chardin: "Someday, after we have mastered the winds and the waves, the tides, and gravity, we will harness for God the energies of love, and then for the second time in the history of the world... [we] will have discovered fire." Culture wars and the ways technologies are shifting the nature of relationship certainly do hint that we have something yet to learn about the power of love. Nonetheless, as a relationally-oriented person, you inherit a legacy as deep as your biology and as broad as family tradition.

#### The Social Value of Relational Nature

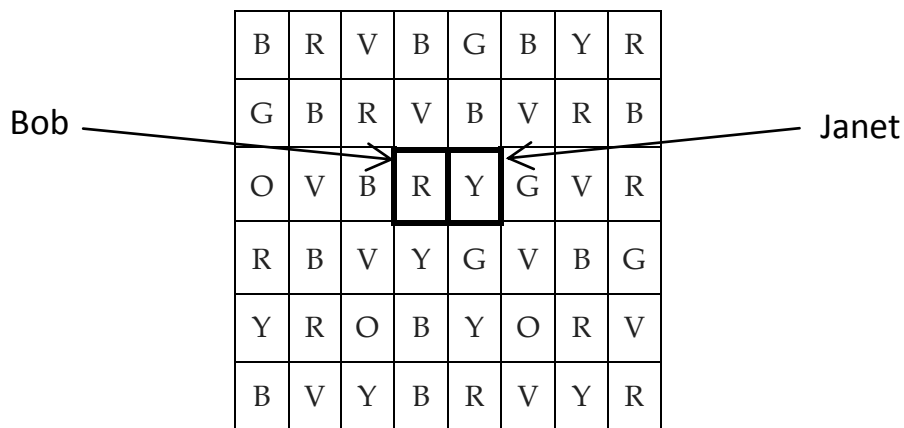
The 1954 musical, *Peter Pan*, is set in a world in which each baby's first laugh creates a fairy which will live until that child stops believing. Captain Hook poisons Peter's medicine, and his fairy-sidekick, Tinker Bell, drinks it herself to prevent Peter from being poisoned. As Tink fades toward death, she tells Peter that she could conquer the poison if enough children would clap their hands and say they believe in fairies. Peter begs the audience, "Please! You've got to believe! Please, you've just *got* to. Clap your hands! Stand up and shout, 'I believe in fairies!' Please, I'm begging you!" One member of the audience stands, then another and another, until the entire audience is clapping and shouting that they believe in fairies.

If you are naturally relational, then you understand the deep truth of this moment, that allowing love to shape our beliefs makes a real difference in a magical way. But other people in the audience count it as theatrical fluff. They don't really believe what they are shouting. How

could they? To them, truth is objective; no matter how many people believe in them, fairies still won't really be real. People like you who are naturally relational need no mathematical proof of the Tinker Bell Effect – the play is proof enough, as far as you are concerned – but, if you love anyone who is not naturally relational, I urge you to affirm them by explaining yourself in terms of complexity theory.

As a toy example to demonstrate the mathematics, imagine people decided which colors to wear by assigning scores for their popularity and objective goodness. Suppose the best colors had similar objective goodness, so popularity would always be the tie-breaker. To a naturally relational person, "popularity" refers to the portion of people closest to him or her who wear that color. The scoring calculation yields different results for each relationally-oriented person because each has a different set of closest friends.

To aid in visualization, complexity theorists often imagine social networks in which each person has eight closest friends represented as adjacent squares on a checkerboard. In a world of forty-eight people, Monday might have looked like this:





In this example, Bob wore Red on Monday, and Janet wore Yellow. Bob and Janet are closest friends, so they have similar social circles, but each has three closest relations which the other does not. Bob's eight closest relations wore Red, Violet, Blue, Yellow, Green, Yellow, Violet and Blue, while Janet's wore Violet, Blue, Violet, Green, Violet, Green, Yellow, and Red. In this whole toy world, twelve people wore Blue, eleven wore Red, ten wore Violet, seven wore Yellow, five wore Green, and three wore Orange. The demonstration does not depend on this distribution of colors – this is just one example that can be given – feel free to invite people to invent their own examples.

Each day, each person wears whichever color they believe is best. Recall that this assessment ultimately boils-down to popularity, which, for the relationally-oriented, happens to be biased towards closer relations. In the case of a tie, let's say people stick with the color they wore previously. Then, on Tuesday, Bob would continue to wear Red because there was a tie on Monday between Red, Blue and Yellow among himself and his closest relations, but Janet switches to Violet because Violet was the most popular color among herself and her closest relations (three wore Violet). Counting all the switches in this whole example, Tuesday would look like this:

B	R	V	B	B	B	Y	R
B	B	R	B	B	V	R	R
B	B	B	R	V	V	V	R
R	B	B	Y	Y	V	V	G
Y	R	B	Y	Y	O	V	R
B	Y	B	B	B	V	Y	R

By Friday, the shifting stops. At this point, each person is wearing the most popular color among his or her closest friends (except the person wearing Yellow, whose friends are split between Violet and Blue, so she keeps wearing Yellow). Blue has come to dominate the entire left-hand side of the board, but the minorities of Red, Violet and Yellow are entrenched:

B	B	B	B	B	B	R	R
B	B	B	B	B	V	R	R
B	B	B	B	V	V	V	R
B	B	B	B	V	V	V	V
B	B	B	B	Y	V	V	V
B	B	B	B	B	V	V	V

Notice the clustering, the creation of homogeneous regions and thus of boundaries. Boundaries are a natural consequence of relational evaluation. They will emerge for almost any random example you try.

In a large-enough world with enough initial diversity, a complete rainbow of colors would remain. Relational orientation stabilizes to something interesting like a map. But if relational orientation were banished from the world so that “popularity” became defined *objectively*, then each person would go to Consumer Reports online or some other source of objective research on Monday night, and discover that Blue is the most popular color in the world. That is an objective statistic – it is the same no matter who you are – so everyone would arrive at the same color decision and wear Blue on Tuesday. No other colors would ever be worn again, unless someone suddenly introduced a color that was substantially better than the status quo, which couldn’t happen if new colors evolve gradually.

Without subjectivity to protect diversity, the world would look like this:

B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B
B	B	B	B	B	B	B	B

This is a world without complexity. There are other ways to protect diversity, but they have nasty side effects. For example, those who supposedly distribute objective research could give different accounts to different people, but that would be lying. Contrarianism would be another way to protect complexity, but at the expense of strife. Without *subjectivity*, something no other GRIN orientation offers, diversity and complexity become prohibitively expensive.

Notice that this conclusion does not require the simplifying assumptions that there are six possible colors to wear, nor that everyone has eight closest friends, nor that relationships do not change. In the real world, we see clustering around not only fashion sense, but also around music, religion, food, technology, and politics. If all people chose their religion objectively, instead of adopting whichever religion prevails in whatever part of society they happen to find themselves, our world would support only one religion. The same goes for all other kinds of diversity which cluster. Without relationally-oriented people like you, there would be only one political system, one employer, one kind of music, and one culinary style. Without subjectivity, diversity and complexity would disappear.

Loss of diversity might sound desirable in the short-term for those in the majority, but our world is currently so diverse that most of us are in minorities in one way or the other. Without naturally relational people like you, most people would be forced to abandon their religion, preferences, affiliations, or style. Most people would lose most of who they are – they would become clones. In reality, most people are Tinker Bells who will fade away unless enough people like you allow belief to be biased by love.

To make this point even more stark, imagine a world in which parents did not raise their own children, but instead ranked all offspring in the universe based on some objective formula, and everyone contributed to the welfare of all offspring based on this ranking. No child would feel like anyone loves him or her any less than their parents do. Nepotism and cronyism would be gone. But children would have become a commodity. Someone would inevitably engineer beings to achieve better rankings, and those beings would supplant us. Diversity would disappear. Since objective rankings place most people below the top, loving people based on what they objectively deserve means most people would never be loved much by anyone. An objective world would not only be sacrilegious, boring, less innovative, and disadvantageous to you and I personally – it would be outright cruel to most people forever more.

Complexity theory is still a new field, so many of its insights about relational evaluation may yet be undiscovered. I will mention one other significant finding, if only to assure aspiring mathematicians that relational evaluation deserves more of their attention. In 1994, Mathew Cook showed that some, but not all, naturally relational computers called “cellular automata” are Turing-complete. This means that all other GRIN orientations can emerge from societies composed purely of relationally-oriented individuals. It does not mean that no other orientation is necessary at *any* level, but the potential for emergence is a really big deal. Life

emerges from billions of relationally-oriented atoms, and thought emerges from billions of relationally-oriented neurons. Compared to atoms and neurons, life and thought are spiritual phenomena. Whatever emerges from billions of relationally-oriented people will likely seem spiritual to us.

It is easy to convince most people to appreciate naturally relational people at a personal level—most of us like to be loved. We are easily convinced that suppressing love would entail a loss of generosity, charity, and trust, and therefore would leave us with less to hope for in life. However, that the benefits of relational-orientation also extend to the temples of objectivity: to companies, military units, and research labs where we expect to sacrifice personal comfort for a greater cause. We never outgrow the need for subjectivity. The complexity in companies, military units, and research labs would fade away without it, so even they need to support people with relational nature.

### Your Needs as Naturally Relational

How can societies support naturally relational people like you and maximize the benefit you can bring? Attachments exist in brains rather than actually between people, and the attachments in the brains of naturally relational people are likely to be stronger than those in the brains of people with other GRIN-natures. Thus, to avoid imbalance, you need to attach to other naturally relational people. Connected together, you can serve as the skeleton of a team, family or organization. However, if you disconnect from the skeleton, or any part of your organization is segregated such that your network cannot reach it, then you will not be able to

bring your benefit to it. To the extent you are not socially connected or others hide their needs and feelings from you your contribution will be handicapped.

Furthermore, the biology of attachment is sensitive to mood, to the presence of certain chemicals in the brain. A wealth of research indicates that a neuropeptide called “oxytocin” heightens subjective proclivities ranging from envy and ethnocentrism to trust, cooperation, empathy, attraction and generosity. As of the writing of this book, researchers are testing oxytocin as a treatment for social anxiety disorder, borderline personality disorder, schizophrenia, and autistic social dysfunction. In other words, there is reason to believe that oxytocin serves as an on/off switch for relational evaluation, that society cannot enjoy the benefits of relational evaluation without facilitating the release and action of this neuropeptide.

Such a switch would come in handy in situations for which relational evaluation backfires, such as in abusive relationships. In fact, there is strong evidence that oxytocin turns off on just such occasions, and ramps up when relational-orientation is especially important. It effectively diminishes when we are threatened, and it increases when our main attachments become unreciprocated, thus empowering us to work on those relationships or to form replacements for them. Oxytocin also increases when touching or hugging, or even just thinking about touching or hugging someone we love – that aspect of the switch helps to ensure that we attach to the people we are most likely to touch: our mates and infant children.

Here are some other situations which seem to cause oxytocin levels to increase in the average person: the smell of a bakery, soothing music, intimate conversations, acupuncture, yoga, meditation or prayer, singing in a group, genuine expressions of concern, being noticed, being appreciated, being trusted, the color blue, playing games, gambling, foods which contain

capsaicin (e.g. chili peppers), showing or receiving compassion individually or communally (e.g. corporate charity), liking Facebook posts, shooting guns, and laughing. Of course, different situations may be more effective at putting different people in the mood to form and exercise attachment, so imposing the situations listed above upon others might be less effective than empowering them to track their own mood-triggers (see Chapter 8). Nonetheless, efforts to provide environments that facilitate good mood do have this scientific justification.

Notice that some of the triggers for relational mood spring from other people being in that same mood. When people trust us, appreciate us, make eye contact, and treat us with compassion, our brain chemistry shifts so that we are more inclined to do the same. That's how relational-orientation can spread like a contagion. Connecting a critical mass of relationally-oriented people together can produce a virtuous cycle which spills into the rest of an organization.

On the other hand, mood is fragile. One person pushing the off-switch can completely undermine investments in mood-making. Therefore, support for relational-orientation must be a team effort. Society as a whole needs to be sold on the idea of creating a supportive environment, so the first step in empowering naturally relational members to contribute their best in an organization is to convince everyone else to value and respect their nature.

Imagine a naturally relational person's first performance review: In an ideal situation, the manager might say, "We've noticed that you tend to invest in relationships, making our organization more like a family. Every organization should strive to be like a family – families are the most successful organizational form ever – so we really appreciate your contribution, and have tried to remove any social barriers that might get in your way. Relationship takes

courage. We are forming groups of people like yourself who can support and encourage each other. Meanwhile, we want you to keep going. Here is a list of the specific people we hope you can help bring closer into the family..."

Realistically, however, after praising naturally relational people for their enthusiastic compliance, managers typically say something like this, "There is also an area in which I would like for you to improve: Healthy relationships require respect, and that starts with self-esteem. Have you noticed people rolling their eyes behind your back? It's because they think you are 'emotionally needy.' I believe in you, but you need to believe in yourself. This is not a nursery – it is the real world where people need to hold each other accountable. You need to climb the ladder of success. I don't know why you are afraid to challenge your coworkers. Maybe a counselor could help you find your confidence. I suggest this only because I want you to be successful. I want you to have healthy relationships and to fulfill your potential."

Teams ultimately succeed or fail as groups, but the latter kind of manager seems fixated on evaluation of individuals. Lack of group-level incentives can make it very difficult to protect against this kind of discrimination. People who do not share your nature may explain your behavior by thinking you lack the training or intelligence needed to behave like them, so they may try to dumb-down your work for you. Failing to recognize your passion for the group, they may assume your lack of individualistic goals comes from doubting your individual ability. They do not appreciate your relational nature, so they conclude that you are weak. Healthy relationships do require respect, and the second performance review confirms that this work environment will not provide the respect you need.

To be tolerated, each orientation needs special license, and relationally-oriented people need to be allowed to favor the people closest to them. If everyone behaved subjectively, then



anyone who lacked friends would fall through the cracks. That's why not everyone should have this license. Is attachment-based love as noble as altruistic love? Perhaps not, but a society which does not indulge cliques loses its diversity. Society needs attachment-based love. Therefore, as unjustified or unfair as it may seem, society needs to treat you and other naturally relational people as the emotional heart of our world.

On the other hand, you also need to learn to recognize the importance of other orientations, to accept a balance in which the naturally relational contribute, but do not rule. Part Two of this book describes teachings about the GRIN-orientations. Taken as a whole, they show how each type of person needs the others, but you may be especially interested in Chapters 10, 12 and 15 which are devoted to altruism, social change, and the challenge of relational role-models.